Philadelphia Engineer District

Constituent-Driven Issues

Congressional Constituent Letters

Philadelphia Engineer District

- In much of the Corps, congressional interaction is in response to constituent letters forwarded to the District Engineer for a response
- We thought it important to discuss responses to the most common subjects, based on review of the past several years of congressional letters

Multiple Letters

Philadelphia Engineer District

- It is not unusual to receive multiple letters on a subject within a short timeframe
- Multiple letters, either by a group of constituents or by a single constituent to one or more legislators, are all prepared by the same person or group of persons
- The District also prepares input to responses if a letter is sent to our Division Office in New York or our Washington HQ.

Flood Plains

Philadelphia Engineer District

- The Corps works for FEMA in preparing some flood plain studies based on FEMA guidelines
  - Most are done by private engineering firms based on the same FEMA guidelines
- The Corps does get limited funds to respond to a citizen inquiry on whether a specific property is within a floodplain boundary
  - We also get limited funding to support municipality studies
- The Corps does not make policy on floodplain management
  - The local community agreed to follow FEMA guidelines as a requirement for the community flood insurance policy holders to get lower flood insurance rates
  - These guidelines do restrict some types of construction within the designated floodplain
- The Corps regulatory mission is limited to waters of the Unites States
  - We don’t have jurisdiction on floodplains, just wetlands and waterways themselves

Disaster Assistance

Philadelphia Engineer District

- Besides providing sandbags and technical assistance, direct Corps disaster assistance is limited to community (not individual) support
  - But only after all local and state resources have been exhausted and a written letter is received from the Governor
- We continue to perform disaster work after a disaster declaration but only as a contractor for FEMA
  - Primary Corps missions are debris removal, restoring power, plus providing ice and water
- We are not and never have been a citizen disaster grant provider

Flooding/Erosion Assistance

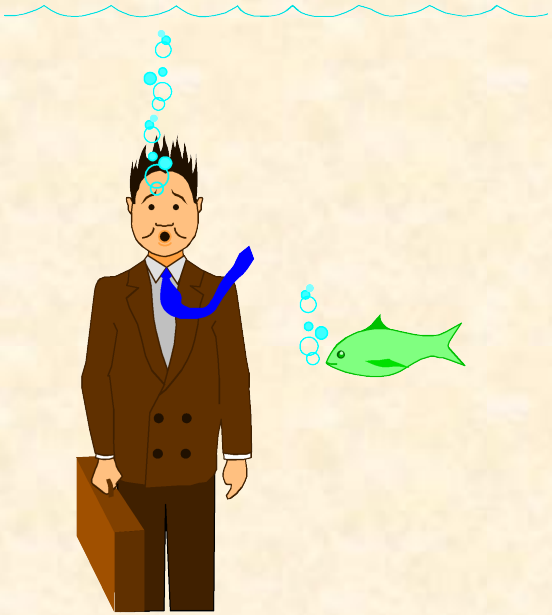
Philadelphia Engineer District

- A site visit is needed to evaluate the situation
  - Since a sponsor is needed even to start a study to see if Federal involvement is warranted, we insist that a local government representative attend
- Many times, the problem can't be undertaken by the Corps
  - It's either too small, or won't meet economic justification requirements
  - If at all possible, we provide some alternative agency that may be able to provide assistance
- Often where a Corps involvement is warranted, we experience difficulty in obtaining a sponsor letter requesting assistance
- We are not a grant agency and can not accept most other Federal funds as the non-Federal share for a study/project

Stormwater Management

Philadelphia Engineer District

- There is a minimum stream size below which the Corps can't participate in a flood study
  - That goes back to 1938 when the Congress gave the Corps a flooding mission
- We also don't repair or assist with facility maintenance
- We do assist in repair of local flood control projects after a storm…
  - If the project meets minimum design criteria and is adequately maintained
  - Eligibility must be determined before the storm event



Request for Public Assistance

Philadelphia Engineer District

- We have no authority or ability to assist scouting groups, the Little League, or any other organization in grading a property, fixing a building, or anything similar
  - We have few construction people, mainly inspectors
- We refer all such requests to the State National Guard offices or to a Reserve Unit which can sometimes provide such assistance as part of a training exercise
  - However, since 9/11, most of these units have few or no resources available for such requests

Request for Ecosystem Restoration

Philadelphia Engineer District

- A small ecosystem restoration project can be sponsored by a non-profit environmental agency
  - We just removed a bridge with the Nature Conservancy to improve habitat for an endangered freshwater mussel
- The requirement for a sponsor still exists
  - We don't provide grants and can't credit other Federal grant funds as the local share
  - We have split a fish passage restoration project so that U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service funds were used for one fish ladder and Corps funds for another
- Dam restoration can rarely be an ecosystem restoration project since it doesn't improve habitat but preserve it
  - Same with buying open space, which is not a Corps mission
  - Congress would have to add direct authority, followed by funding

Project Implementation

Philadelphia Engineer District

- Once a project gets funds to conduct a Feasibility Study and a project is justified… it still may not be built
- Local funding is many times a problem
  - Last year the Reading School Board restored a stream using our design and volunteer staff supplemented by a grant
- Acquisition of real estate is a local responsibility
  - Depending on the number of parcels it can take months or even years
- Once we turn over a project to the sponsor for maintenance, we inspect the project every year or two to ensure it is maintained properly
  - Sometimes local funding of even minor repairs becomes an issue

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Philadelphia District

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Philadelphia District Legislative Workshop

March 23, 2005